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ABSTRACT

This document presents an outline of a number of social, economic, and demographic trends that influence the effectiveness of instruction and the social development of youth across the country. It contains numbers and statistics, recommendations, and implications, along with 30 references. The document covers trends in the following areas: (1) racial and ethnic diversity, including data on racial and ethnic demographics, and mobility and poverty among African American and Hispanic populations; (2) changing family patterns; (3) poverty, particularly the poverty of children; (4) homelessness, focusing on homeless children and youth, the fastest growing segment of the homeless population; (5) teen pregnancy, including recommendations for sex-education programs in schools; (6) the availability of drugs and alcohol; (7) factors that inhibit risky student behavior; and (8) demographic planning, including the use of demographic data to support educational agendas and to decide how to allocate resources. (WFA)

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Trends and Issues

Social and Economic Context

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Social and Economic Context

Compiled by Chris Cunningham, research analyst and writer

Revised May 2003

Social and economic conditions may vary considerably from one geographic area or even one school district to the next, and specific trends and issues will have more relevance for some districts or states than for others. Yet a number of social, economic, and demographic trends continue to influence the effectiveness of instruction and the social development of youth across the country. The ability or inability of school districts to respond swiftly to the effects of such issues as poverty, drug use, teen pregnancy, and homelessness has profound long-term implications for students, families, and entire communities.

As a percentage of total U.S. population, some racial groups have increased dramatically in recent years. What was once the minority student population in many school districts is now the majority, and this new majority is sometimes composed of three or more racial or ethnic groups. Such demographic shifts, which influence the composition of student enrollment, will continue to alter the culture of the nation's public schools.

Twenty percent of children in the U.S. lived with only their mothers in 2001, while about 4 percent lived with only their fathers, and four percent with neither parent (*America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being 2002*). The number of parents with whom a child lives is strongly associated with the financial, and sometimes emotional, resources available to the child and to his or her overall well-being. Children who live in a household with only one parent are substantially more likely to have family incomes below the poverty line than are children who live with two parents. They are also more likely to suffer from academic problems.

According to one report, children and youth are the fastest growing segment of the homeless population. Half of all homeless children do not attend school regularly, often because of enrollment or transportation barriers. Both school districts and the general public are frequently unaware of homeless children's instructional rights. According to the Education Law Center, "a federal law, known as the McKinney Act, requires states to provide homeless children and youth with the same access to free public education as is available to other students."

Although teen pregnancies are on the decline, four out of ten young women still get pregnant at least once by age twenty (Brown 2002). Some of these young women drop out of school. They and their children run the risk of being marginalized by their peer groups and their communities.

Alcohol consumption is nearly universal among teens. Eighty-one percent of youth report having used alcohol by the time they are in 12th grade. The use and misuse

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of alcohol among adolescents is considered America's number-one health problem (Maney and others 2002). Use of alcohol and drugs also contributes to other high-risk behaviors. In the U.S., approximately three-fourths of all deaths among persons aged 10-24 years result from only four causes: motor-vehicle crashes, unintentional injuries, homicide, and suicide.

An estimated seven million children go home alone after school. The hours between 3 p.m. and 8 p.m. are the most likely times for youth to engage in risk-taking or delinquent behaviors or to be victims of a crime. Youth who are left alone after school are far more likely to use drugs and alcohol, receive poor grades, and drop out of school than their peers who have adult supervision after school.

A number of solutions are showing results in reversing or reducing the negative impact of a variety of social and economic trends. Sometimes, simply raising awareness of an issue spawns progress toward a long-term solution. Other solutions emerge only after careful scrutiny of demographic trends.

Racial/Ethnic Diversity

Hispanic students are the fastest growing ethnic group in the nation's elementary and secondary schools. In 2000, 39 percent of public-school students were considered part of a minority group, due largely to growth in the U.S.'s Hispanic population (National Center for Education Statistics 2002).

Today's growing diversity has implications for school administrators in three major areas:

Mobility. More than forty-three million Americans move every year, reflecting the highest level of mobility of any population in the world. The number of blacks and Hispanics is currently about thirty-seven million each (Hodgkinson 2002). Hispanics and Asian populations are expected to grow, but just a handful of states will absorb the majority of this growth.

Racial and ethnic demographics. How minority groups are defined has become a complicating factor in arriving at accurate figures on minority populations. For example, the Census Bureau regards Hispanics as an ethnic rather than a racial group. In the 2000 Census, while most Hispanics checked white for their race, three million checked black.

Poverty. Although the majority of poor children in the U.S. are white, only 16 percent of all white children live in poverty, compared to 37 percent of all black and Hispanic children (Hodgkinson 2002).

Increasing racial and ethnic diversity is requiring schools to change what they teach, how they teach, and how they communicate with parents who are not fluent in English. School districts must be willing to hire interpreters and provide written materials for parents in a language they can read and understand.

School systems need to anticipate, and budget for, costs that may be related to racial and demographic changes. Schools may need to allocate more funds in the following areas:

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- bilingual-education programs
- special-education classes
- free-lunch programs
- written materials in other languages

The percentage of school-age children who speak a language other than English or have difficulty speaking English has more than doubled over the past two decades—from 2.8 percent to 5 percent (Brown 2002, Association of School Business Officials International).

Children who speak a language other than English at home and who also experience difficulty speaking English face greater challenges progressing in school and, after they become adults, in the labor market. The percentage of children who have difficulty speaking English varies by region of the country, from 2 percent in the Midwest to 11 percent in the West. The number of children who speak another language in addition to English varies by region as well, from 8 percent in the Midwest to 29 percent in the West. (*America's Children. Key National Indicators of Well-Being* 2002) In addition to providing bilingual-education programs, free-lunch programs, and written materials in other languages, another way school administrators can prepare to deal with greater diversity, says Harold L. Hodgkinson (2002), is to focus on preschool program development and keep abreast of demographic trends. For example, the number of minority households is projected to rise by 15.3 million over the next two decades, comprising 64 percent of household growth. Such demographics have important implications for policymakers who are interested in expanding affordable rental housing and home-ownership opportunities for an increasingly diverse population. Currently, the disparity in income between whites and nonwhites threatens to widen the gap between those who can afford decent housing and those who cannot (Millennial Housing Commission Report 2002).

Some argue that the achievement gap in schools results in lifelong negative consequences, including fewer opportunities for minority students to obtain college degrees, locate employment, or earn a family wage. Recent research on the achievement gap shows that earlier gains have been reversed (Lee 2002). Factors that were once believed to contribute to the educational achievement gap between whites and blacks and whites and Hispanics—such as family income, parents' educational level, exposure to violence and drug use, and school desegregation—no longer seem to account for today's gaps. Lee (2002) suggests that the joint or simultaneous influence of these factors needs to be explored: Policy issues such as immigration, desegregation, funding equalization, and standards-based education reform need to be addressed in these analyses, as well as racial and ethnic biases that are embedded in state and district policies.

In her editorial, "How the Question We Ask Most About Race in Education Is the Very Question We Most Suppress," Mica Pollock (2001) notes that although many in official capacities, as well as members of the general public, seem to believe that race determines performance, "when one is faced with describing a perceived problematic racial pattern… a common response is what we might call colormuteness. Reluctant to navigate the question of how race may matter, we actively delete race terms from our talk." However, Pollock argues that silence about racial achievement disparities allows

them to remain intact, and runs the risk of normalizing them and making them seem acceptable, "a taken-for-granted part of what school is about."

Changing Family Patterns

During the past several decades, an increase in the number of births to unmarried women is among the changes in American society that have affected family structure and the economic security of children. Children of unmarried mothers are at risk of having low birth weight, higher infant mortality, and other problems. They also are more likely to live in poverty than children of married mothers and are at greater risk of suffering other consequences because the social, emotional, and financial resources available to the family may be limited (*America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being* 2002)

Schools will continue to see fewer children from traditional two-parent families. It's less likely that children will have two parents at home or that they will have stay-at-home moms. In addition, three million children are now being raised by their grandparents. And almost as many are raised by same-sex parents (Hodgkinson 2002).

A sharp rise in the number of nonfamily households is also occurring. Nonfamily households, defined as individuals or unrelated persons who live together, add further to the diversity of the U.S. landscape (Millennial Housing Commission Report 2002).

Traditional family structures and parents' education levels are positively related to higher mathematics scores, according to a team of researchers who explored the relationship between middle-school students' academic development and the influence of their social backgrounds. The study, which included thirty-two nations, noted a relationship between single-parent families and lower academic performance by students. The authors speculated that school-age youth from single-parent families in developing countries may be marginalized by their peers and social structures. They suggest that policies reducing or eliminating social-class inequities may help adolescents from nontraditional family structures achieve the same social and academic levels as students who live with both parents (Schiller and others 2002).

In addition to weakening family stability, lower household income may play a role in the risk of family violence if other factors are present in the environment. A recent study that examined the incidence of family violence as it pertained to lower income households did not find a direct link between limited family resources and the odds of violence, yet it noted that for those who are employed—whether they are male or female—the nature of the job, its effects on the worker, and the sense that work is a necessity all contribute to the risk of violence in the home. For females, other risk factors for violence include living in a disadvantaged neighborhood, having several children, working outside the home, and having a partner who wants her to work more hours (Fox and others 2002).

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Poverty

According to the Children's Defense Fund,

- A child is born into poverty every forty-three seconds.
- A child is born without health insurance every minute.
- Ninety percent of the nine million uninsured children live in working families.
- Seven million children are often home alone without adult supervision after school—when they are at greatest risk of getting into trouble. (Edelman 2002)

Households in the lowest 20 percent of the income distribution—with an average annual income of $10,500 in 2000—have seen almost no gains since 1975 after adjusting for inflation. As employment and housing continue to shift to suburban and nonmetropolitan areas, those living in city centers are left with a lack of access to social and economic opportunities, including good-quality housing, health care, and schools, all of which are essential to family and economic stability (Millennial Housing Commission Report 2002).

The most severe performance problems exist in schools where there are a high proportion of low-income children who live in less stable homes and whose parents have less education. American students are among "the best and the worst in the world" when they are disaggregated, according to one international study. It just depends on where they go to school, says Paul D. Houston, executive director of the American Association of School Administrators. Because schools are funded largely by property taxes, schools in low-income areas have less real capital to operate with. But the real issue facing schools serving low-income families, Houston says, is the caliber of their teachers and principals. Schools with high concentrations of poor children frequently have the least prepared teachers, and they are less likely to be certified. These schools also experience the highest levels of staff turnover. But high-poverty schools don't just need greater numbers of experienced teachers to thrive, Houston says, they also need strong, experienced administrators.

Others agree that qualified, experienced teachers will play a major role in narrowing the achievement gap. "If you want to understand the root of the achievement gap, it's the teacher gap that exists between the affluent schools and the less affluent schools," asserts David Haselkorn, dean of national education programs and policies at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

The "teacher gap" refers to the fact that students in high-poverty, high-minority, and low-achieving schools have the least access to qualified instructors. The *Quality Counts 2003* study notes that almost one-third of students in high-poverty secondary schools take at least one class from a teacher who hasn't actually majored in the subject, compared with one-fifth of students in low-poverty or low-minority schools.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is aiming to reverse these shortcomings by requiring all newly hired teachers in schools receiving federal Title I money—those that generally enroll youth from low-income families—to be "highly qualified to teach core academic subjects such as English, reading, language arts, civics and government." The law defines highly qualified teachers as those who are fully licensed through traditional

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or alternative routes and demonstrate competence in the subjects they teach, either by having an academic major or its equivalent or by passing a subject-matter test. The law also requires that parents be informed when their child is being taught by a teacher who does not meet the criteria for being classified as "highly qualified" (Olson 2003).

Some school environments can and do make a difference in the lives of children caught in poverty. There is evidence that leadership training and awareness for school administrators, district policies focusing on quality instruction, and small school district size all can help to narrow the achievement gap between high-poverty and low-poverty schools (Howley and Bickel 2002).

Some researchers assert that small schools and school districts have a positive effect on the quality of education for children from poor families. In their study of 13,600 schools and 2,300 districts, Howley and Bickel (2002) refer to what they call the "excellence effects" of size, in which smaller schools and smaller school districts with large numbers of economically disadvantaged students are likely to have higher average test scores than their larger counterparts. These findings show a consistently predictable relationship between small schools and small school districts and higher test scores in the six states studied. The authors also found a pattern they call the "equity effects" of size. These effects focus on the strength of the relationship between socioeconomic status (SES) and achievement. In general, the odds of getting high test scores are improved by high SES and made worse by low SES. The authors noted that the relationship between aggregate achievement (student achievement averaged for a school or district) and SES was consistently weaker in smaller schools and districts (Howley and Bickel).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2002), the highest poverty schools—defined as having more than 75 percent of students eligible for subsidized lunch—have the following characteristics:

- These schools (in areas of most severe poverty) have a lower percentage of white students and a higher percentage of Hispanic and black students.
- They have a higher percentage of student absenteeism.
- Additionally, a lower percentage of high-poverty students reflect a "very positive" attitude about student achievement.
- Finally, these schools also have lower parent involvement. (National Center for Education Statistics 2002)

This widely recognized lower achievement of poor and minority students begs for more attention to poverty and other social-justice issues in education-leadership programs, suggest Linda Lyman and Christine Villani (2002). School leaders need an indepth understanding of poverty and its complex, interrelated causes; of American beliefs about the causes of poverty; and of poverty's effects on families, children, and learning. According to Lyman and Villani, "Schools that are succeeding with high numbers of children living in poverty are schools in which informed, compassionate and committed leaders have the skills, knowledge and attitudes to make a difference."

High-performing, high-poverty schools have the potential to provide the same opportunities with curriculum and instruction, and a similar learning environment as do low-poverty, high-performing schools, says Jennifer A. Bell (2001). She notes that high-performing, high-poverty schools tend to do the following:

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- Implement rigorous standards
- Focus on high-quality teaching and learning
- Emphasize hard work
- Hire principals who are models of strong instructional leadership
- Intervene early to promote student success
- Work actively with parents to engage them in the learning process

Homelessness

The best current estimate for homelessness in the U.S., according to the *Report of the Bipartisan Millennial Housing Commission* (2002), indicates that:

- At least 800,000 people are homeless on any given night.
- Between 2.3 million and 3.5 million people experience homelessness in a given year.
- Fifteen percent of the homeless are households with children.
- Nearly 200,000 children are homeless on a given day.
- In addition to those living in shelters or on the streets, an unknown number are doubled up temporarily with relatives or friends.
- A study of nine metropolitan areas found that between 2 and 10 percent of all poor families are homeless in a given year.

Children and youth are the fastest growing segment of the homeless population, and more than half of homeless children do not attend school regularly. The Education of Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program, one of the programs in the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (PL100-77), was created to address these issues. An EHCY report describes the five most common barriers in meeting the needs of homeless children within school districts:

- Educators and the general public are not aware of the severity of the problems of homeless youth, and therefore do not consider their rights to education or their needs and those of their families.
- School-enrollment processes are cumbersome for many homeless youth. School districts are hesitant about eliminating requirements for birth certificates, immunization records, and documentation about legal guardianship, for example.
- Homeless shelters, motels, campgrounds, and other temporary housing are not on regular school district bus routes, which means homeless students cannot easily get to and from school.
- In-school and related services, including access to talented and gifted programs, and special-education programs, extracurricular activities, and services such as tutoring, sports, and counseling, are less available to homeless students.

- Homeless youth are difficult to identify, which is a barrier to district outreach programs: Homeless youth are highly mobile; may wish to avoid being identified; or may be unable to meet attendance or course requirements, if they are enrolled in school.

The EHCY has recommended the following solutions for removing these barriers:

- Raise awareness of homeless families' needs.
- Disseminate information on the McKinney Act widely so that school districts understand the policies.
- Hire state homeless coordinators who work with districts to provide accessible services to enrolled students who are homeless.
- Coordinate districtwide efforts to serve this population. (U.S. Department of Education 2002)

Among the factors that contribute to homelessness in this country is the severe shortage of affordable housing. To afford a modest two-bedroom unit in 2002, at the national median fair-market rent, a worker had to earn $14.66 per hour, which is nearly three times the minimum wage (that is, $5.15 an hour or $10,712 a year).
Housing costs create other survival issues for low-income families (National Low Income Housing Coalition 2002):

- Families who have to spend the majority of their wages on housing are less able to pay for food, clothing, or health care, let alone transportation or childcare, making it difficult to go to school or work each day.
- Renters must allocate a high percentage of their income to housing, a situation which, at best, prevents saving for home ownership, and, at worst, compels them to decide which basic necessities will go unmet.
- Children whose families cannot pay rent are twice as likely to change schools, compared with those with more stable housing arrangements.
- Children who move frequently do worse in school.

Additionally, the absence of an affordable rental or housing market stymies the normal progression from renting to owning and restricts people from "moving up" as income and family needs change. Also, young people may have to remain in, or move back to, their parents' home, or entire families may have to move in with relatives when rental housing is unaffordable (National Low Income Housing Coalition 2002).

Teen Pregnancy

The birth rate for teenagers fell again in 2001 to 45.9 births per 1,000 females aged 15-19 years, a five-percent decline from 2000 and 26 percent lower than 1991. The 2001 rate for teenage pregnancies is the lowest in more than six decades for which comparable data has been available (National Vital Statistics Reports 2002).

Birth rates for other age groups have also decreased:

- The birth rate for teenagers 15-17 years fell 8 percent.
- The rate for the youngest group, 10-14 years, declined slightly between 2000-2001, from 0.9 to 0.8 births per 1,000 females.
- The number of births to females aged 10-14 years fell 9 percent between 2000 and 2001, the lowest since 1965 (Martin and others National Vital Statistics Reports 2002).

The number of births outside of marriage also declined in 2001(National Vital Statistics Reports 2002). The declines were substantial for teens under 15 years of age—down 15 percent. For teens 15-17 years, the declines were 7 percent. The number of births to unmarried teens 18-19 years fell by 3 percent.

Isabel V. Sawhill, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, suggests that an educational focus on teen pregnancies has played a major role in reducing both out-of-wedlock childbearing and the growth of single-parent families. But she says it really isn't clear whether declining sexual activity among teens or more consistent use of contraception has contributed to the decline (Sawhill 2002).

The societal costs of teen pregnancy outside of marriage are significant. Many children born outside of marriage will live in poverty (Lichter 2001). While only 8.4 percent of women who give birth in marriage are poor, 30 percent of those who give birth outside of marriage are poor. In particular, a disproportionate number of teen mothers are dependent on welfare, with one-fourth receiving financial aid and one-third receiving food stamps.

Even though teen pregnancies are on the decline, four out of ten young women get pregnant at least once by age 20, according to Sarah Brown (2002), in an editorial in the *School Board News*. School failure is frequently the first sign of trouble that can ultimately end in teen parenthood, Brown says. In fact, half of teen mothers in one study had dropped out of high school before becoming pregnant.

Sex-education programs should stress both the value of abstaining from sex and using contraception, Sawhill says. She recommends that sex-education programs teach teens how to deal with peer pressure and how to communicate and negotiate with partners. Community-service work and afterschool programs with adult supervision and counseling have reduced teen pregnancies by one-half (Sawhill 2002).

A recent study by the Rand Corporation also suggests that afterschool programs can help deter teens' likelihood of engaging in sexual activity. The report noted that substantial numbers of youth spend long periods without adult supervision and have limited opportunities to participate in afterschool activities. The study concludes that supervised programs at schools or in other community settings are worth considering (Cohen and others 2002).

Brown offers similar recommendations to schools:

- Provide sex education.
- Teach teens to deal with peer pressure.

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- Involve parents, as well as youth, in sex-education programs: Teens consistently say parents have the most influence over their sexual decision-making.
- Promote afterschool activities, community service, and other youth-development programs and help strengthen teens' motivation to delay pregnancy.

Availability of Drugs and Alcohol

The annual cost of underage drinking in America has been estimated at $58 billion. Such costs underscore the importance of providing health services in schools as well as promoting collaboration among health professionals within a coordinated school health model (Maney and others 2002).

Fortunately, the 2002 Monitoring the Future study indicates that American teenagers are reducing their use of alcohol, illicit drugs, and cigarettes. Funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, the nationwide survey tracked substance use and attitudes among 44,000 students in eighth-, tenth- and twelfth-graders from 394 schools. The findings revealed that between 2001 and 2002, a significant reduction in alcohol use was observed among eighth- and tenth-graders. Although the use rates among eighth- and tenth-graders were record lows in the history of the survey for those age groups, alcohol use is still high for youth in eighth to twelfth grades. For example,

- In 2002, 20 percent of eighth-graders reported that they had used alcohol in the past thirty days, compared with 2001, when 22 percent of eighth-graders had used alcohol in the past thirty days.
- In 2002, 36 percent of tenth-graders had used alcohol in the past thirty days, compared with 39 percent in 2001.
- In 2002, 49 percent of twelfth graders say they had used alcohol in the past thirty days, compared to 50 percent in 2001.

One of the most favorable results in the 2002 survey shows a broad decline in the use of the drug Ecstasy. Ecstasy use had climbed steadily since1998 but showed a drop in use in 2002 for the first time in all three grades. With the reversal in Ecstasy use, the report indicates there is little evidence of increases in illicit drug use among adolescents with the exception of tranquilizers and barbiturates. Cigarette smoking also has dropped sharply for all age groups.

To a large extent, the reports says, prevention programs should focus on one drug at a time, because knowledge of the adverse consequences of one drug will not necessarily generalize to the use of other drugs among youth. "The determinants of use are often specific to the drugs," the study says. "These determinants include both the perceived benefits and the perceived risks that young people come to associate with each drug.... Unfortunately, word of the supposed benefits of a drug usually spreads much faster than the information about adverse consequences" (National Institutes of Health 2002).

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Prevention approaches might also need to consider the differences in habits between males and females, and possibly different ethnic populations. The report, *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being*, states that in 2001, 36 percent of twelfth-grade males reported heavy drinking, compared with 24 percent of females. Among tenth-graders, 29 percent of males reported heavy drinking, compared with 21 percent of females. As adolescents get older, the differences between male and female drinking behavior appear to become more pronounced. Also, heavy drinking is much more likely among white and Hispanic secondary students than their black counterparts. Among twelfth-graders, 12 percent of blacks reported heavy drinking, compared with 35 percent of whites and 28 percent of Hispanics (*America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being* 2002).

Data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, which surveyed 4,485 twelve- to seventeen-year-old adolescents on alcohol use and health-risk behaviors and interpersonal problems, indicates that high-risk youth experience multiple problems as a result of their drinking behavior. Significantly more reported having a hangover; having trouble with parents and friends; and experiencing school problems than did low-risk adolescents. Heavy alcohol consumption causes more deaths of young people between the ages of ten to fourteen in the U.S. than guns and illicit drugs combined. These findings underscore the importance of providing health services in schools as well as ensuring collaboration among professionals, including community agencies, youth organizations, governmental agencies, and the alcoholic beverage industry (Higham-Gardill and Mahoney 2002).

The Leadership to Keep Children Alcohol Free Initiative indicates that high school students have found some successful strategies for reducing or stopping drinking: A survey at University of California, San Diego, reports that 1,069 high school students, ages twelve to eighteen, were asked to list different strategies for reducing or eliminating alcohol consumption. Among their responses are:

- Not going to parties where alcohol is served
- Talking with friends about the dangers of drinking
- Drinking better-tasting nonalcoholic drinks
- Participating in extracurricular activities such as sports, and getting advice from counselors or mentors (Leadership to Keep Children Alcohol Free Initiative)

Factors That Inhibit Risky Student Behavior

In the United States, approximately three-fourths of all deaths among persons aged ten to twenty-four years result from only four causes: motor-vehicle crashes, other unintentional injuries, homicide, and suicide. Health-risk behaviors that contribute to premature death among youth and adults often are established during youth, extend into adulthood, are interrelated, and are preventable, according to the study called the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS), which monitors six categories of priority health-risk behaviors among youth and young adults.

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The six categories are: unintentional injuries and violence; tobacco use; alcohol and other drug use; and sexual behaviors that contribute to unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Thirty-four state surveys and eighteen local surveys were given to students in grades nine through twelve (Department of Health and Human Services 2002). Among the YRBSS results:

- 14.1 percent of teens surveyed state they had rarely or never worn a seat belt during the thirty days preceding the survey.
- 30.7 percent had ridden with a driver who had been drinking alcohol.
- 17.4 percent had carried a weapon during the thirty days preceding the survey.
- 47.1 percent had drunk alcohol during the thirty days preceding the survey.
- 23.9 percent had used marijuana during the thirty days preceding the survey.
- 8.8 percent had attempted suicide during the twelve months preceding the survey.
- 45.6 percent of high school students had sexual intercourse.
- 42.1 percent of sexually active students had not used a condom at last sexual intercourse.
- 28.5 percent of high school students had smoked cigarettes during the thirty days preceding the survey.
- 78.6 percent had not eaten more than five servings per day of fruits and vegetables during the seven days preceding the survey.
- 10.5 percent were overweight.
- 67.8 percent did not attend physical-education class daily.

Alternative schools and programs offer one solution for averting high-risk behavior and addressing concerns about violence, weapons, and drugs on elementary and secondary school campuses, as well as alleviating fears about "potentially dangerous students" being out on the streets. The National Center for Education Statistics—in the first national study of its kind called "Public Alternative Schools and Programs for Students At Risk of Education Failure: 2000-2001 Statistical Analysis Report,"—says that students generally are sent to alternative placements if they are at risk of education failure because of poor grades, truancy, disruptive behavior, or pregnancy. Despite the need, a national survey indicated that just 39 percent of school districts have alternative programs for at-risk students. Sixty-five percent of those districts had only one alternative school during the 2000-01 school year, even though the demand for such programs exceeded capacity in the 1999-2000 academic year (Kleiner and Farris 2002).

Another approach to reducing high-risk behaviors among youth comes in the form of "out-of-school" programs. These programs have the potential to make the most of kids' free time by turning potentially risky afternoons into opportunities for growth and development. Children living in poverty don't have the same opportunities as children whose families can afford music and dance lessons, sports programs, and other extracurricular activities. An estimated thirty million children—at least 12 percent of children ages five through twelve—spend some time each week without adult supervision. Among twelve-year-olds, 35 percent are regularly left unsupervised while the parents are working. Students who spend one to four hours in extracurricular

activities each week are 49 percent less likely to use drugs and 37 percent less likely to become teen parents than their peers who do not participate in such activities. But today's out-of-school programs met only 25 percent of the demand in urban areas last year (Ross 2002).

Even though schools deal frequently with youth who live in households that tolerate weapons, drugs, and dysfunctional behavior, few theoretical models identify the major contributors of adolescent violence. Yet "adolescents bring the impact of these experiences to school," say Mary E. Riner and Robert Saywell (2002). Teachers and administrators can help prevent adolescent delinquency by providing positive recognition when youth display behaviors that avoid violent behaviors such as pushing, shoving, and fighting, and criminal acts in which youth are both victims and perpetrators. Through classroom instruction that teaches students to appreciate diversity, recognize emotions, and engage in prosocial responses to conflict, adolescents can learn skills in the classroom that help them avoid violence (Riner and Saywell 2002).

One study reports that addressing mental-health issues such as depression and substance abuse may have a preventative effect on HIV risk, because acting-out behaviors such as intravenous drug use and sexual promiscuity tend to diminish with behavioral treatment. A number of factors contribute to acting-out behaviors, including substance abuse and psychiatric and emotional disturbances, all of which impair social judgment. Although most junior and senior high schools offer HIV- and AIDS-education programs, the rate of HIV infection continues to rise among teens. Some studies indicate that knowledge is not always correlated directly with behavior changes (Hackerman 2002). Hackerman says homeless youth and those struggling with their sexual orientation also are at high risk of contracting HIV.

Demographic Planning

Comparisons with similar demographic populations can inform district planning decisions. Demographic data include background information on students, staff, and schools, such as gender, ethnicity, identification number, number of years in the district, attendance, teacher certification, and school enrollment (National School Board Foundation 2001). Parents, taxpayers, and teachers across the country have said they would use, among other indicators, the demographics of students to hold schools accountable (The Education Commission of the States 2003).

Moreover, data can support a program's success when they are used to compare results with similar demographic populations. Many states report results to districts and schools in terms of how they do against a standard, as well as how their results compare to schools that are similar demographically (The Education Commission of the States 2003).

School boards and superintendents can effectively use demographic data to support educational agendas and decide how to allocate limited resources. (The Education Commission of the States). More specifically, demographic studies can be used to provide reliable enrollment projections and determine whether it will be necessary to build new schools. A thorough demographic study can help a school district save tens of millions of dollars if it discovers, through demographic information it has

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gathered, that a new school is not needed after all. Also, because changing conditions in the economy or housing market might seriously affect enrollment projections, school districts should update their demographic study annually (Grip 2002).

Data have qualitative benefits as well, including:

- Helping to depersonalize decisions
- Focusing on student achievement
- Deepening community understanding about shared responsibility for student achievement
- Identifying new issues or challenges
- Providing opportunities to celebrate success (National School Board Foundation 2003)

Yet despite the need, Victoria L. Bernhardt (2003) says school board members might not use such information because school district databases may not provide historical data or may be difficult to use or access. Sometimes, she says, districts simply don't want board members involved in any student-achievement concerns other than finance, safety, and nutrition.

The consequences of not using data can run deep, Bernhardt says. Among the consequences of not using data in decision-making processes: "We do the same things over and over and expect different results" (National School Board Foundation).

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